

Follow Him

Episode 8: Guest: Dr. Casey Griffiths

Doctrine and Covenants 14-17

“Stand as a Witness”

Show Notes

Podcast General Description:

Follow Him: A *Come, Follow Me* Podcast with Hank Smith & John Bytheway

Do you ever feel that preparing for your weekly *Come, Follow Me* lesson falls short? Join hosts Hank Smith and John Bytheway as they interview experts to make your study for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' *Come, Follow Me* course not only enjoyable but original and educational. If you are looking for resources to make your study fresh, faithful, and fun--no matter your age--then join us every Sunday.

Podcast Episode 8 Description:

Part 1:

We meet the Whitmers and follow the early Restoration Heroes as they travel and work between the Trifecta of Translation: Harmony, PA, Colesville, NY, and Palmyra, NY. Dr. Casey Griffiths explains the Whitmer family's closeness, shares a story of miraculous farming, and relates the early Saints' character. Join Hank, John, and Dr. Griffiths to discuss why repentance needs rebranding.

Part 2:

We continue Part II with Dr. Griffiths and our discussion the witnesses of the plates including: Lucy Mack, Mary Whitmer, and dozens of women who have been essential to Church History. We discuss the Nephite Interpreters, the breastplate, the plates, and how Joseph and the Lord love to share visions and experiences. The Restoration is not a one-man show.

Timecode:

Part 1

- 00:00 Welcome
- 00:30 Casey Griffiths Bio
- 03:01 Three Families of the Early Restoration
- 06:55 David Whitmer Farm Miracle (Three Nephite-type Event)
- 10:58 Whitmer Family Lifesaving Mission
- 14:30 Angel Moroni Sighting
- 18:35 David Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery, and Joseph are the Translating Trio
- 21:29 David Whitmer's Character and Later Life
- 27:17 David Whitmer Never Denies the Book of Mormon
- 31:36 Dr. Griffith Tells Personal Worthiness Story
- 33:55 We Need to Repent About Repentance
- 41:38 Endure to the End Means Stay Loyal to the Savior
- 43:17 Emma and Others Work as Scribe
- 47:27 Miraculous Translation Process and First Person Sources
- 53:26 Whitmer Family are Reliable Witnesses to The Translation

Part 2

- 00:00 Welcome
- 00:08 Begin Discussion on Doctrine and Covenants 17
- 03:38 Joseph Rejoices to Share Plates with Men and Women
- 06:42 Many See the Plates (Some Under a Cloth)
- 09:09 Mary Whitmer Visited by Moroni and the Plates
- 13:21 Elizabeth Whitmer Cowdery Testifies of Translation
- 14:52 Artifacts and Plates
- 18:02 The Lord and Joseph Share Miraculous Experiences
- 24:43 Sally Heller Story About Joseph and Oliver's Countenances
- 27:04 Mary Elizabeth Rollins Leitner Describes Transfiguration
- 28:52 The Three Witnesses Never Deny Their Testimony
- 31:38 Whitmer Farm Most Blessed Days
- 31:57 Eight Witnesses
- 34:46 These Sections like Patriarchal Blessings
- 36:54 David Whitmer in Later Life as a Witness of the Book of Mormon
- 39:34 Personal Story about Childbirth Varies with Who Tells the Story
- 44:22 Translation Required Good Relationship with Emma--Church Work Requires Home Life to be a Priority
- 47:45: Dr. Griffiths Testimony
- 50:22 Doctrine and Covenants Heroes are Imperfectly Perfect

Sources:**BIO:**

Casey Paul Griffiths is a professor of Church History and Doctrine at Brigham Young University. Originally from Delta, Utah, he holds a Bachelor's Degree in History, a Master's in Religious Education, and a PhD in Educational Leadership and Foundations from Brigham Young University. He is the author of numerous articles and book on Latter-day Saint History, most recently *50 Relics of the Restoration*, and *Truth-Seeker: The Life of Joseph F. Merrill, Educator, Scientist, and Apostle*, which will come out later this year. He lives in Saratoga Springs, Utah, with his wife, Elizabeth, and his four adorable children.

Fair Use Notice

The *Follow Him Podcast with Hank Smith and John Bytheway* may make use of copyrighted material, the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright holder. This constitutes a “fair use” and any such copyrighted material as provided for in section 107 of the US Copyright Law. In accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107, the material on this podcast is offered publicly and without profit, to the public uses or the internet for comment and nonprofit educational and informational purposes. Copyright Disclaimer under Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976, allowance is made for “fair use” for purposes such as criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching, scholarship, and research. In such cases, fair use is permitted.

No copyright(s) is/are claimed.

The content is broadcasted for study, research, and educational purposes.
The broadcaster gains no profit from broadcasted content. This falls under “Fair Use” guidelines: www.copyright.gov/fls/fl102.html.

Note:

The *Follow Him Podcast with Hank Smith and John Bytheway* is not affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints nor Brigham Young University. The opinions expressed on episodes represent the views of the guest and podcasters alone. While the ideas presented may vary from traditional understandings or teachings, they in no way reflect criticism of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day leaders, policies, or practices.

Episode 8 Part I

Doctrine and Covenants 14-17 : Dr. Casey Griffiths

Hank Smith:	00:02	Welcome to followHim, a weekly podcast dedicated to helping individuals and families with their Come Follow Me study. I'm Hank Smith.
John Bytheway:	00:10	And I'm John Bytheway.
Hank Smith:	00:11	We love to learn.
John Bytheway:	00:12	We love to laugh.
Hank Smith:	00:13	We want to learn and laugh with you.
John Bytheway:	00:15	As together, we follow him.
Hank Smith:	00:20	My friends welcome to another episode of followHim. We are a podcast designed to help individuals and families with their Come Follow Me studies.
John Bytheway:	00:31	Today, we have Casey Griffiths with us and I have an official bio from religious education down at BYU. Casey Griffiths was born and raised in Delta, Utah. He served his mission in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Returned home to complete bachelor's in history from BYU and later earned a master's in religious education and a PhD in educational leadership and foundations at BYU. And he's focused on the development of religious education programs among the Latter day Saints. Before joining the faculty in Religious Education at BYU, he served in Seminary and Institutes for 11 years as a teacher and a curriculum writer, and his research focuses on the history of religious education. He's married to Elizabeth Ottley Griffiths. They live in Saratoga Springs with three adorable children. And Casey, we're so glad to have you today.
Dr. Casey Grifff...:	01:27	Good to be here. Four children now.
John Bytheway:	01:30	Oh, that's great. We got an update.
Dr. Casey Grifff...:	01:31	My family is growing.
Hank Smith:	01:32	Oh, Casey, we're so excited having you here. And just on a personal note, I've known Casey for many years. We've been in

the same hallway at BYU and he is everything [crosstalk 00:01:40].

Dr. Casey Griff...: [01:40](#)

Now we run the same PHD program.

Hank Smith: [01:43](#)

I mean, it's a long time, and Casey, everything you would hope that Casey is, he is. He is kind, he's generous, he's humble. He is just very down to earth. One of my favorite stories of him is, I saw this nice coat he had on and I said, "I like that coat, where'd you get that coat?" And he looked at it and said, "Oh, at the D.I." He's like, "That's where I get a lot of my clothes."

Dr. Casey Griff...: [02:10](#)

That's where all my books come from also.

Hank Smith: [02:14](#)

You could probably pick up John a nice books there at the D.I., right John? We have our own shelf. Listen, there are some amazing books at the D.I. We'll, we didn't know we were going to do a commercial for Deseret Industries.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [02:28](#)

Keep up the good work.

Hank Smith: [02:30](#)

We are excited to have you with us, Dr. Griffiths, and we want to tap into your historian brain today for our listeners. So this week, our Come Follow Me lesson takes us into the Doctrine and Covenants, of course section 14, 15, 16, and 17. These are shorter sections, and if I'm a first time reader through the Doctrine and Covenants, or my first exposure to church history. I run into a name, a family name that I probably haven't heard before in... It doesn't show up in Joseph Smith history and it doesn't show up yet in the Doctrine and Covenants until I get to section 14 where it talks about the Whitmer family. So what can you tell us about the Whitmers and how they came in contact with Joseph Smith?

Dr. Casey Griff...: [03:23](#)

Well, just as an organizing principle, when you're studying the early history of the church, you can simplify it down to a three families basically. I mean, the church at this stage is really three families in three different locations. There's the Smiths in Palmyra, and the Knights in Colesville and Harmony, Pennsylvania. And then there's the Whitmers in Fayette. And in sequence, Joseph Smith gets the plates in Palmyra, spent three months trying to translate, but there's just too much persecution in Palmyra. So he leaves and goes down to Harmony where the Knights are and where Emma's family's from. And about a year of bookworm and translation takes place in Harmony, then things in Harmony get too intense. And they contact this family called the Whitmers that Oliver has ties

to, and they move up to Fayette, New York, and that's where they spend the last month of translation.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [04:17](#)

So for a lot of the translation it's just Joseph and Oliver and Emma, in this little cabin in Harmony, Pennsylvania. The great thing about the Whitmers is they're this big sprawling family, a number of siblings in and out of the house. And so a lot of our accounts of translation and what went on during the last month of the translation of the Book of Mormon come from the Whitmer family. And then a year later, when the church is organized, it's organized in the Whitmer family home.

Hank Smith: [04:44](#)

Any idea how Oliver got in touch with the Whitmers? Did they leave any account of how they met Oliver? Because he ends up marrying a Whitmer, right?

Dr. Casey Griff...: [04:53](#)

Yeah. Oliver is a Whitmer. I mean, it's good to think of him that way. He's a brother-in-law, he marries Elizabeth Whitmer. But we don't really know exactly how they come into contact, except that they were friends with Oliver before Oliver moved to Palmyra and boarded with the Smiths as the local school teacher. And then Oliver goes down and volunteers as Joseph's scribe, and that's when translation takes off. But there is a revelatory elements too. Lucy Mack Smith, who's one of the best sources for this early period, uses the language that Joseph was commanded to write to the Whitmers. We don't have a revelation that marks that, but her phrase is Joseph was commanded to write a letter to one David Whitmer, a man Joseph had never seen, but he was instructed to say to him that he must come with his team immediately to convey Joseph and Oliver back to his house, which was 135 miles away. And that they might remain there until translation was completed.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [05:48](#)

So things are starting to get bad in Harmony where Joseph and Oliver have been engaged in translation. And Lucy Mack makes it sound like the Lord intervened, that Oliver may have had a prior relationship with the Whitmers, but it's really the Lord that's telling Joseph, this is where you're going to complete the translation. And these people will provide a shelter and protection while this work is going on.

Hank Smith: [06:13](#)

Casey, I wonder how much the Whitmers knew of Joseph Smith before this. I mean, there had to be, I mean, Fayette and Palmyra and Manchester, what are they? They're 30 miles apart. I wonder if they'd heard anything.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [06:27](#)

Fayette's about 30 miles away from the Hill Cumorah. And so it's very likely because the whole area is up in arms, especially

after Joseph gets the plates. That the Whitmers knew a little bit about what was going on and had received, I'd like to think their own spiritual witness. There's a couple of unique experiences, for instance, that happened before the Whitmers go to get Joseph, they convinced them that they need to engage in this process.

Hank Smith: [06:56](#)

I got to hear this.

John Bytheway: [06:58](#)

In fact, this was one of my questions I wanted to ask the story that sounds like it could possibly be a Three Nephites type story, involving plaster of Paris. Which I used in an elementary school to make stuff, but apparently there's an agricultural use for plaster of Paris.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [07:16](#)

So this story comes from Lucy Mack Smith again. Again, she's our source on most of this stuff. And she says that David Whitmer is the one that's supposed to go down and get Joseph and Oliver at the end of May, 1829 and bring them back to Fayette to complete the translation. And she said that David was getting ready to go, but he had to sow the soil with the plaster of Paris. Which is this action that's designed to reduce the acidity of the soil so that it works a little bit better. The way she records it, she said, "The next morning, David took a wooden measure under his arm and went out to sow the plaster, which he had left two days previous in heaps near his sister's house.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [07:54](#)

But on coming to the place, he discovered it was gone. He ran to his sister and inquired of her if she knew what had become it. Being surprised, she said, "Why do you ask me? Why was it not also in yesterday?" "Not to my knowledge" answered David, "I'm astonished at that." Continue to sister for the children, came to me in the four noon, begged me to go out and see the men who sow the plaster in the field.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [08:13](#)

Saying they never saw anybody sow plaster so fast in their lives. I accordingly went and saw three men, this is your Three Nephites connection here, at work in the field, this the children said. But supposing that you had hired some help on account of your hurry, I went immediately in the house and gave the subject no further attention." Lucy goes on to say, "David made considerable inquiry in regard to the matter, both among his relatives and neighbors, but was not able to learn who had done it.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [08:38](#)

However, the family were convinced that there was an exertion of a supernatural power connected with the strange occurrence

and David immediately set out for Pennsylvania and arrived there two days without injuring his horses in the least, though the distance was 135 miles." So they've got this big work to do. I mean, we sometimes forget that in the background of all these miraculous spiritual events, you still have to plant your crops and harvest them and do things like, sow the field with plaster of Paris. They have these three men show up and do it. And some people have made that connection because there's three, and because nobody seems to have known where they came from. David didn't hire them, his sister doesn't know where they came from. That these are somehow connected to the Three Nephites disciples in the Book of Mormon.

Hank Smith: [09:25](#)

Wow. That's absolutely incredible. I can't imagine, I wish this would happen to me more often. Where someone says, "All that paper was written by somebody. You do turn it in." I did.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [09:41](#)

For me it would be, three men appeared and graded all your papers and I'd be like, wow. I must have something important to do elsewhere.

John Bytheway: [09:49](#)

So the interesting part though is, it sounds like there was an urgency connected to it, because David was going to delay a little bit. So the plaster in the field, and because somebody did this, he was like, "Oh, I better go to Harmony." Is that the gist of it?

Dr. Casey Griff...: [10:07](#)

That's it. Things in Harmony where Joseph and Oliver have done the first two months of translation, were starting to get bad, really bad. In fact, the next summer, after the translation is done, Joseph goes back to Harmony. That's where he lives. That's where his farm is. That's where his wife's family is from. And the next summer he's arrested two times and brought before a court. Eventually he and Emma, a year after this are going to have to leave Harmony altogether because persecution is so severe down there. And so there's indications, I mean, Lucy Mack says that Joseph really had the feeling that someone was going to make an attempt on his life. And that's why they had to get out of the area and go up to Fayette.

Hank Smith: [10:48](#)

I was going to say in a way the Whitmers are, this is a lifesaving mission, not just a, hey, we're going to help out with work.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [10:59](#)

It's not just a, hey, this is a nice thing. I mean, the work might not go forward unless we intervene and they intervene. It's a huge act of faith on their part but it's a significant shift in the restoration. For the rest of the New York period, the Whitmer home is church headquarters. And that starting the day, David

Whitmer picks them up and ends the day that the Lord commands them to all move to Ohio.

Hank Smith: [11:23](#)

Wow. John, what were you going to say?

John Bytheway: [11:26](#)

I just keep thinking of how ironic these names are. There's Harmony, where there wasn't a whole lot of harmony. There's a Liberty where there wasn't a whole lot of Liberty. These interesting names in church history, but the church, what they've done there is just beautiful in Harmony, and moving some things around and having the highway moved. I can think of three places where they've succeeded in having the highway moved. In Kirtland, in Palmyra and in Harmony. And then built these beautiful restorations of these cabins in Harmony. Can't you go there and be in almost the same space where a lot of the translation occurred?

Dr. Casey Griff...: [12:08](#)

Yeah. And at each place there's a unique special spirit. I mean, in each place, the church has rebuilt the structures that Joseph Smith would have been in when he's performing translation. And for instance, if you go to the Whitmer farm, the building is reconstructed. They reconstructed it for the sesquicentennial of the church in 1980. But even sitting in a reconstruction, you just get this sacred feeling of translation and then later events that happened. For instance, that same summer Joseph Smith said the voice of God was heard in the chamber of old father Whitmer. And authorized them to ordain each other to the Melchizedek priesthood. I mean, it's a wonderful spirit and you just get this sense that this is one of those turning points in history and to stand in the spot where it occurred is really a great honor.

Hank Smith: [13:00](#)

That is.

John Bytheway: [13:01](#)

And I believe there's, to the East of there a cemetery with one of the Smith's infants that's there in the cemetery.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [13:12](#)

In Harmony, right next to where Joseph and Emma would have had their farm. There's a cemetery and there there's a little headstone for Alvin Smith, the first son of Joseph and Emma. Obviously named after Joseph's brothers. This is the little boy that died during the episode with lost manuscript. And that's part of the reason why Joseph Smith wasn't able to get up to Palmyra and find out what had happened to the manuscript was that, Joseph and Emma had a baby die and then Emma almost died afterwards. So it's actually Emma, two weeks after the birth that tells Joseph, my family can take care of me, get up there and find out what happened.

Hank Smith:	<u>13:52</u>	Wow. I think each of these individual spots, they are like you've said Casey, they are special places. I will say this as a, and I know both of you have guided church history tours. I've guided my own church history tours down there. And if I could tell these early saints one thing, I'd say, could you do this a whole lot closer together because these bus rides are really long. And second, if you could do them around just better restaurants that would be helpful as well. But sometimes I'm going man, this is a two hour bus ride, they should have just done all this right here in Palmyra. Right John? Why do you got to spread this out so much?
Dr. Casey Griff...:	<u>14:30</u>	Well, imagine 135 mile trip by horse as well. Lucy Mack makes the comment specifically that it was miraculous that he was able to travel that far and not injure his horses. Which again, to them, a miracle is something different than what we talk about today. We complain about a two and a half hour bus ride, imagine riding in a wagon. And in fact there's an incident on the way back from Harmony, that David Whitmer records too. That maybe you've heard of. That's where he sees the Angel Moroni on the side of the road.
Hank Smith:	<u>15:01</u>	Tell us about that. I want to hear about that.
Dr. Casey Griff...:	<u>15:02</u>	David Whitmer lives longer than any of the three witnesses of the Book of Mormon. A lot of people interview him. In one of the interviews, he says, they're traveling from Harmony back to Fayette, and this is the way he recorded it. He said, "A very pleasant, nice looking old man suddenly appeared by the side of our wagon and saluted us with good morning, it is very warm. At the same time, wiping his face or forehead with his hand. We returned the salutation and by a sign from Joseph, I invited him to ride if he was going our way. But he said, very pleasantly, no, I am going to Cumorah. This name was something new to me. I did not know what Cumorah meant. The Book of Mormon hasn't been published, so nobody knows the name Cumorah. We all gazed at him and each other, and as I looked around and quietly of Joseph, the old man instantly disappeared. Joseph later on told me it was the messenger who had the plates and had taken them from Joseph just prior to our starting from Harmony."
Dr. Casey Griff...:	<u>15:55</u>	So it's not just men traveling between Harmony and Fayette, it's angels. But it's funny to me that the Whitmers... David sees the angel and Mary Whitmer also sees the angel, they both describe him as a pleasant looking old man. Which we tend to imagine him as like this WWE wrestler figure that's huge and muscular. They describe him as a nice guy on the side of the road. And you

were expecting an angel they saying something more profound than it is very warm. But I guess even angels talk about the weather.

John Bytheway: [16:28](#)

It makes me sad because I think, wait, you mean even when you're resurrected being, you're doing stuff like, man, it's hot.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [16:37](#)

Maybe he's trying really hard to pretend not to be a resurrected being. So he's sitting in the room like, "Gosh, you guys, boy, it is warm for you mortals, is it not?"

Hank Smith: [16:47](#)

And he winks at Joseph Smith. Was it Joseph who told him who he was?

Dr. Casey Griff...: [16:51](#)

Yeah. Apparently they get further down the road.

John Bytheway: [16:55](#)

And Joseph says, you know who that was?

Dr. Casey Griff...: [16:57](#)

Because you would imagine David turning to Joseph and going, "Where's Cumorah? And Joseph later on saying, "Well, that's the angel."

Hank Smith: [17:07](#)

That's him in his 1800s garb walking down the street.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [17:12](#)

So the next time you're in that two and a half hour drive between Fayette and Harmony, you can at least tell that story and fill a few minutes of time.

Hank Smith: [17:20](#)

All right. That is a great story.

John Bytheway: [17:22](#)

I think too. When I've been there, I've just been impressed that the first time I drove by Harmony, 25 years ago, there was hardly anything there. And now that church has a nice church building there and has rebuilt these cabins, of course moved the highway and everything. But it just made me think, oh so when Joseph was translating, if he wanted to put something that could be verifiably ancient in the Book of Mormon, he could just go over to the Harmony Public Library and find something. And it's like, there's nothing there. And even now this is, the church history side is the only thing there, I guess maybe it was a bigger community at some point.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [18:04](#)

You're right, that it was always relatively small and rural. All the places where the Book of Mormon was translated are relatively out of the way small and and not well trafficked.

John Bytheway:	<u>18:16</u>	Tell you that's what I said, better restaurants. We've got to do this by better restaurants. So I have a couple more questions about the Whitmers before we move into the meat of section 14. How old is David and is it his farm or is it his parents?
Dr. Casey Griff...:	<u>18:35</u>	It is his dad's farm. So it's the Peter Whitmer Sr. farm. Peter's married to Mary Whitmer. And then their kids are John Whitmer, David Whitmer, Peter Christian Whitmer, there's also a couple of Whitmer sisters like Elizabeth, who marries Oliver Cowdery. There's Katherine Whitmer who marries Hiram Page, who's one of the eight witnesses of the Book of Mormon. Then there's Anna Whitmer. And David Whitmer is the closest in age to Joseph Smith. So it's likely that David and Joseph would have formed the strongest connection because they're at similar ages. There are at similar points in their life. It seems like David and Joseph and Oliver Cowdery were kind of the three amigos during this time.
Dr. Casey Griff...:	<u>19:15</u>	They were very good friends and they were very close. But other Whitmer brothers like John and Christian and Peter Jr, are all involved in translation. And that's one of the interesting things about the translation as it happens at the Whitmer farm, is like I said, it's not just Joseph and Oliver and Emma, like it is down in Harmony. This is a whole bustling household with people moving in and out. And that's why a lot of the historical accounts of translation are linked back to the Whitmer family. They're there during the last month, and a lot of them live multiple decades after they leave the church and share their histories. They're interviewed by a lot of people.
Hank Smith:	<u>19:55</u>	Wow. Just one more question about the Whitmers and then let's jump in. But they're of German descent, right?
Dr. Casey Griff...:	<u>20:04</u>	Yes.
Hank Smith:	<u>20:04</u>	Are they spiritual people before they meet Joseph? Because you look at Joseph's family and some of them were devout Presbyterian. Were the Whitmers, did they have a religious background?
Dr. Casey Griff...:	<u>20:17</u>	They were very devout and very religious. I'm trying to remember their religious affiliation. One of the things you see in the recent video that was released that they show at Fayette, is they depict the Whitmers with German accents. And that probably is accurate. Peter Sr. and Mary are both German immigrants, and so they would have spoken with the German accent and the kids probably would have grown up around there too.

Hank Smith:	<u>20:45</u>	I love that. Man, I love that. And I remember Dr. McKay in his interview, he said, "Listen, these aren't crazy, this isn't Joe Bob down by the river, these are upstanding people in the community." These are complex... What did Dr. Dirkmaat say John? These are competent farmers.
John Bytheway:	<u>21:04</u>	All right. That has always been a nice testimony boost for me. They weren't gullible fools, they were smart people. And then you get the Orson Pratt's and the Parley Pratt's. And then later on, these were smart people and it helps me to go, this wasn't just some guy that was very charismatic and found a bunch of gullible people to follow him.
Dr. Casey Griff...:	<u>21:29</u>	And even later on in their life, David Whitmer, for instance, is elected mayor of Richmond, Missouri. He's a respectable member of the community. And when people cast aspersions on his testimony, the Book of Mormon, he takes it as a personal insult. Like he asks people in the community where he lives to sign an affidavit, basically saying that he's a man of good character, that he's upright, that he's honest, and that he doesn't lie to people, especially about something as big a deal as the Book of Mormon.
John Bytheway:	<u>21:59</u>	Well, and I've always thought he knows he's answerable to a lot more than just Joseph someday for what he's going to do with his testimony of seeing the plates. So I've always thought he's really careful. No, wait, I need it to be known that, no, I saw those and I've never denied it. How old was he when he died, Casey?
Dr. Casey Griff...:	<u>22:23</u>	David makes it into his eighties, I believe. He's, like I said, the longest live to the Book of Mormon witnesses. And especially as more and more of the witnesses pass away, more and more people try to interview David. There's a book about this thick just called David Whitmer Interviews. Where Linden Cook collected all of the people that sat down and spoke with David Whitmer, whether they were pro church, anti-church and what David said to them. It's a remarkable read first of all for consistency, but also because David gives more details about those early days and about the appearance of the Angel Moroni than any other person does.
John Bytheway:	<u>22:59</u>	Well, and I know that the Interpreter Foundation, somebody is making a movie called Witnesses, right now.
Hank Smith:	<u>23:06</u>	That comes out this summer, I believe.

John Bytheway:	23:09	I'm excited for that because I think it was so wise to have witnesses, and we'll get into this later perhaps, but to have three in a very spiritual way, to have eight in a very tactile way to see the plates and everything is amazing. Maybe now, as we're learning who the Whitmers are, can we look at what the Lord's message is to them in these three sections coming up.
Hank Smith:	23:35	I want to hear if Casey teaches the Doctrine and Covenants to BYU. So I want to hear what his highlights are in these three sections and how the Whitmers would have received them.
Dr. Casey Griff...:	23:44	A couple unique things in these sections, these all come during that month that Joseph Smith is at their home translating. And every historical account says it was a busy time. There's a lot going on, a lot of comings and goings, and Joseph and Oliver are rushing to complete the translation of the Book of Mormon. But along the way, it was very, very common for a person to approach Joseph Smith and say, "What's the will of the Lord concerning me?" And that's exactly what happens in section 14, 15 and 16, is there's these three Whitmer brothers, David, John, and Christian who are asking, what does the Lord want me to do? And each of the revelations is really short. For section 15 and section 16, for instance, are almost identical except for one or two things about it. And each one of them follows a pattern that's common at this time starting with section four, which is first given to Joseph Smith's dad.
Dr. Casey Griff...:	24:39	A marvelous work is about to come forth. The Lord will generally tell them that you're called to the work. And I want you to thrust in your sickle with your mind and start to harvest souls. And a lot of these early people, whether it's section 4, Joseph Smith Sr. or section 11 is to Haris Smith, section 12 is to Joseph Knight. And then section 14 is to David Whitmer. They're among the earliest and most important missionaries for the church. Now, there are a few differences though, for instance, verse 7, David Whitmer, this is section 14, verse 7. Is told, if you keep my commandments and endured to the end, you shall have eternal life. Which gift is the greatest of all the gifts of God? And it shall come to pass if you shall ask the father in my name and faith, believing you shall receive the Holy ghost, which given utterance that you may stand as a witness of things of which you shall both here and see that you may declare repentance out of this generation.
Dr. Casey Griff...:	25:35	So right there, the Lord is hinting at bigger things for David that he's going to act in a role as a witness, which he does. He's one of the three witnesses, almost every single one of the three witnesses and the eight witnesses is a member of the Smith

family or the Whitmer family. The only exception is Martin Harris. He's the only one that's not linked either one of those families. But David's here is told specifically to endure to the end. Now I mentioned that a lot of people have the opportunity to speak to David Whitmer. One of them was B. H. Roberts who becomes this important historian in the church later on. B. H. Roberts visits with David Whitmer after he leaves the church. And David Whitmer talks about the experience he has with the angel when the three witnesses see the plates. And B. H. Roberts said that the angel during the experience, the [inaudible 00:26:25] turned and looked directly at David and said, "David, blessed is he that endureth to the end."

Dr. Casey Griff...: [26:33](#)

And then B. H. Robert's comments and says, "It's a sad reflection of these three witnesses that David was the only one who died outside of membership in the church." I wonder if Moroni was not trying to sound a warning to the stubborn man, that perhaps whatever his experiences and trials may be, that the last he too might've been brought into the fold and might've died within pale of the church.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [26:52](#)

So every single one of the witnesses has slight variances, but according to B. H. Roberts, David told him that the angel and the Lord in section 14, both specifically tell him that it's a marathon, that he's got to endure to the end. And though David never denies his witness to the Book of Mormon. He does become very bitter against the church later on in his life.

Hank Smith: [27:14](#)

Especially Joseph Smith.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [27:17](#)

David writes a pamphlet in 1887 where he very bitterly screeds against Joseph Smith. And is angry and upset of him, and yet there's this unique contradiction where David never, ever denies the Book of Mormon or that the Book of Mormon was true or that the revelations that happened during this time were genuine. So I always tell my students, it worked out the best possible way it could have for the Restoration Movement, just not for the Whitmers. Like you have this group of people that leave the church, but never deny their testimony. So they have no motive to uphold Joseph Smith if he's a fraud, and yet they refuse to deny their testimony to the day all of them leave the earth.

Hank Smith: [28:01](#)

One thing that I was hoping our listeners that would happen as a result of our podcast is, seeing the Whitmers in a positive light, how helpful they truly were to Joseph Smith and that we can hear them out and listen to them and not think of them as apostates.

- Dr. Casey Griff...: [28:20](#) And to be honest with you, a lot of the early events in the history of the church, the Whitmers are a very important source. John Whitmer who's one of the recipients of these revelations as well becomes the church's historian. And section 47, John writes an early history of the church that's invaluable to us today. And the other thing is that John is probably responsible for recording most of the early revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants. There's a beautiful book called Revelation Book 1, Revelation Book 2, where John Whitmer sat down and recorded all of the early revelations that are given to Joseph Smith. I mean he's a major source for the Doctrine and Covenants.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [28:58](#) And so really until 1838 or so, there's no stronger witness in the church than the Whitmers and they're real stalwarts. And even though we sometimes talk about the entire Whitmer family leaving, even that's not correct. Peter Whitmer and Christian Whitmer both die within the faith.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [29:16](#) It's later on in 1838 when the entire family leaves together. And that's one thing about the Whitmers too, is that they were united as a family. Like they came into the church all in. When trouble came up in 1838, they all left together too. And they stick together for the rest of their life. Most of them, except for Anna Whitmer live within a 50 mile radius of each other. And they try to start their own church a couple of times too. Like they definitely, as a family were united on the same page and that's something that's really admirable.
- Hank Smith: [29:47](#) They're very close to each other. I really liked that. I wanted to mention two things in the section that I saw John and then maybe you can jump in. One, I'm a New Testament teacher, and so when the Savior approaches his apostles, he says, "From henceforth, you're going to catch men." And I like in section 14, it's the field is white, all ready to harvest. So as a teacher, he takes something that his students already understand and says, "I'm going to help you understand my work, what we're going to do here. I'm going to use farming because that's what you understand. So I'm going to use farming as this principle." And then in section 15 and 16, which you said Casey are very similar.
- Hank Smith: [30:35](#) He says, "The greatest thing you can do for me is declare repentance onto people, declare repentance on the people." So as the Lord is changing his methods for his students, he's not changing the message. The message is always the same, repent, repent, repent. And I've noticed in Joseph Smith's early life, it seems his experiences with divinity always start with repentance. The first vision was about, can I be forgiven of my

sins? Moroni was, I felt like I, do you know I had just fallen, I wasn't doing what I should be doing, so I'm going to repent. All of these divine experiences start with repentance. So for me personally, I'm going, I need to repent more. If I want to have experiences with the divine, I better start looking for ways to repent. And you, John, you know very well, it's hard for me to repent because it's just hard to find things. It's hard to find things to repent of, but I'm going to look harder and see if I can find some things of.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [31:37](#)

One thing that's always touched me about Joseph Smith at this stage in his life, is that idea that he needs to check in with God. If you're reading about his experience with Moroni, he says, "I was anxious to know my standing before the Lord." That's why he goes and prays. It's like, he hasn't done anything super wrong, but he's just wondering how come I'm not getting more, maybe I am doing something wrong and I didn't know it. There was an elder on my mission, he was a convert to the church. He had a giant marijuana leaf tattooed to his shoulder. We thought he was the coolest guy ever. And he was so sincere that like, he read that passage in Joseph Smith history. And he told me, "I pray to know my standing before the Lord."

Dr. Casey Griff...: [32:21](#)

And I was a zone leader at the time, so he saw me as like an ecclesiastical figure. And I go, "Well, tell me what happened." He goes, "I don't know, that night I had a dream and I was walking in a chapel and I went into this room and president Hinckley was there." President Hinckley was the prophet at the time. He said, "President Hinckley looked at me and gestured and said, I need you to come over here and help me ordain this young man to the priesthood elder, because I know that you're worthy of the priesthood you hold." And this missionary looked at me and said, "Well, what do you think that dream means?" And I go, "It sounds like you're worthy of the priesthood you hold." And it was funny because having grown up in the church, I had never once thought about that.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [33:01](#)

I took my priesthood and my calling as a missionary for granted. I went home and I did the same thing. I didn't feel like I had a need to repent, but I hadn't asked my status before the Lord. And the next day after I had said that prayer, we were out on a random media referral to drop off a Bible. And the lady that we were dropping the Bible off to said, "I hear that you guys give blessings. Could you give me a blessing?" And I remember looking at my companion with a big grin on my face and saying, "Well, I guess we're worthy to do that, so let's go ahead." But in all these people, it's wonderful to see with David Whitmer, with John Whitmer, with the rest of the Whitmers, this desire to

know, am I okay? Like, what is my status before the Lord? And what work would he have me do? We don't often ask those questions often enough maybe.

Hank Smith: [33:54](#)

No. The scary part is if you ask the Lord, he'll probably tell you.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [33:59](#)

Yep.

Hank Smith: [34:00](#)

Probably tell you your standing. As a father, if I don't know what to do for family home evening, it sounds like in section 15 and 16, where it's like, well, the thing that's of most worth is declare repentance. So let's default to repentance and the atonement of Jesus Christ. Let's make that a big part of our focus of teaching our children or teaching our students. It sounds to me like the Lord is saying, you can't talk about repentance enough.

John Bytheway: [34:32](#)

And I really, we brought this up in previous podcasts, but I just love the Bible dictionary definition of repentance. A fresh view about God, about oneself and about the world. And it doesn't have to sound like a scolding type thing as much as... I love what you said Casey, how am I doing? It sounds like that. I want to see what my standing is before the Lord. Am I doing okay? I could use some encouragement here. How am I doing? And the Lord always seems to be so encouraging too thankfully. And I think maybe we can glean from that too.

John Bytheway: [35:09](#)

And I wanted to ask, and this is something that in Matthew 16, whom do men say that I am? And when Peter gives his awesome answer, Jesus says, "Thou art Peter." Well, I noticed in section three, there was a thou art Joseph. And I mean they know that the Lord knows their names. Is there more going on here? Here we are in section 14, verse 11 and behold thou art David. Right after saying, I am Jesus Christ, the son of the living God. Verse 9 and 10, kind of then thou art David. Any comment on that similarity? We see that pattern.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [35:52](#)

I mean, in all these revelations, he identifies them by name. For instance, for a section 15, first verse, my servant, John. Section 16 first verse, my servant Peter. It was important that they were called by name and that they were recognized and known of God. Sometimes that was what a revelation did and almost nothing else. Was to just say, I know you.

Hank Smith: [36:15](#)

I know who you are.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [36:16](#)

I know who you are. I know what your struggles are and I want to help you reach your potential. Which again, a really short

revelation like section 15 or section 16, even that could be a really powerful message to help somebody join in the work and get on the path they need to get into.

Hank Smith: [36:36](#)

John I like what you said, the Lord is always very encouraging, isn't he? It's okay, I'm going to help you. I like what Casey said there, I'm going to help you reach your potential. That seems to be the message of a lot of these opening sections of the Doctrine and Covenants. He says I know you and I want to help you.

John Bytheway: [36:54](#)

And even their first names, Peter was just Simon Peter, but well, Simon [inaudible 00:37:02] or whatever in Matthew 16. But here you're David, you're Peter. I like that and I draw a lot of hope from Jesus's parable of the Pharisee and the Publican. That the Pharisee is outlining all of these ways that he's so righteous, telling God how righteous he is. And the Publican just says, "God, be merciful to me a sinner, smote upon... He wouldn't even look up. And for Jesus to say that man went home justified and not the other, gives me a lot of hope about just getting on your knees and how am I doing? I'm sorry, I mess up. And how encouraging the Lord is, it kind of is a [inaudible 00:37:42]. I like Moroni, taught today.

Hank Smith: [37:45](#)

I have noticed in the New Testament in my studies, that a lot of the parables, a lot of the sermons are just different ways to repent. Different angles to view repentance. It's just over and over, the Lord's messages on repenting. I'm going to share a quick story. John Huntsman Sr. told this story about his friend Harold W. Hunter, where he his friend as President of the Church, how would you like to be best friends with the President of the Church? He invited him, he said, "Can you come over to my house and give me a blessing?" And when he got there, I'll make the story quick, when he got there, he said, "Are you sick? And he said, "No, I'm not sick. I just feel I need a blessing." And John Huntsman Sr. said, "Well, are you okay? What's the problem if you're not sick?" And he said, "Today, I had an unkind thought and I just need a blessing." And when I read that story, I thought, you know how many blessings I'd need in a day. So there's always something to repent for. There's always something you could find.

John Bytheway: [38:51](#)

Oh my goodness. Wow. Well, I love this thou art David. And the counsel that he gets to do everything we've talked about, and I'm glad that you told that story about Moroni. Because I found that in my own reading, that Moroni during the three witnesses type event, turned to him and said, "Endure to the end." Wow. Maybe it might be helpful to define what does endure to the

end mean? I mean, I heard Sherry did once say, "That those endure to the end talks, depress the Dickens out of me." If we look at it as like this, I just got to hold onto the end. What do you think endure to the end means?

Dr. Casey Griff...: [39:39](#)

Well I'm glad that it doesn't mean just this life. I used to when I was a young teacher go through and just pronounced verdicts on people in church history. So it would be like, "Here's section 14 and David Whitmer was a good guy, but he died outside the church, so that's it for him." As I've gotten a little bit older, my perspective on that has changed to where I'm giving everybody the benefit of the doubt. David did die outside the church, so did most of the Whitmer clan, but they also stayed true to their witness and their testimony. And that is really significant. They had every reason to deny it and they didn't. And so in that sense, they endured to the end. I mean, if you go to Richmond, Missouri today, and you find David Whitmer's headstone, which isn't difficult, chiseled into his headstone, it says, the record of the Jews and the record of the Nephites are one, truth is eternal.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [40:38](#)

I mean, this is a guy who's serious about his witness of what he saw. He did have conflicts with church leaders, especially Sidney Rigdon and Joseph Smith. But as a witness, which was what he's called to do in section 14, he is 100% faithful and endures to the end. And I'd like to think that in the next life, there was a reconciliation between the two and that the Whitmers are eventually going to receive all the blessings of the gospel. So enduring to the end to me isn't just this life it's eternal life, which the Lord promises to David Whitman right here. That's one of the earliest uses of that term. I think of in the Cannon, was when the Lord says, "If you do this, you'll have eternal life." And like I said, I've gone from saying this person apostatized, so they're done. To having more of an open mind to say, "Well, they stayed faithful to their testimony. So I'll give them the benefit of the doubt and we'll see what happens with them."

Hank Smith: [41:38](#)

That's beautiful. I love that one.

John Bytheway: [41:40](#)

One of the commentaries I've reading, I have a Joseph Fielding McConkie and Craig Ostler Commentary. I have a Steve Robinson and Dean Garrett Commentary, and he says in here, "This doesn't mean perfect or sinless, but it means you stay loyal to Christ." And I liked that. And like you said, Casey, that can be not just in this life, but you're loyal to Christ, loyal to the witness too. So Casey, we know that a lot of the translation took place then in Harmony. And I love how you've helped us with that. But what do we know about the actual process? There's

been a lot of discussion lately about it. What are some things to hang our hat on? This much we know.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [42:28](#)

Well, the Whitmers, like I said are invaluable when it comes to a source of how translation work, the actual mechanics. I think Garrett Dirkmaat was with you guys a little while ago, and he talked about sources. A good historian would always say, let's look at primary sources first and then secondary sources. So when it comes to translation, the two people that we most want to talk to were Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery. And unfortunately there's frustratingly little material from the two of them. They both die really young, Joseph in 1844, Oliver dies a few years later in 1850. And they don't leave behind a whole bunch of sources about how it works, but they're the two that are there the entire time. Emma is involved, Martin Harris is involved. And according to the manuscripts, the Book of Mormon that we have, John Whitmer is also a scribe.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [43:17](#)

Emma said that her brother was a scribe as well. And so we go to them to look at them. Now, Joseph and Oliver, both leave behind narratives where they talk about the plates and also where they talk about the Urim and Thummim and Nephite Interpreters. And the last couple of years, there's been a lot of attention given to the seer stone. Which the Whitmers talk about in the church published pictures of in 2015 as part of the Joseph Smith Papers Project. So I'll just phrase it this way. Joseph and Oliver tend to use the phrase Urim and Thummim to describe the instruments that they use. And both of them also tend to say the Nephite Interpreters when they describe it. Like in 1842, Joseph Smith writes the Wentworth letter. This is what he writes, he goes at great lengths to describe the plates.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [44:05](#)

And then he says, "With the records was found a curious instrument which the ancients called Urim and Thummim, which consisted of two transparent stone set in the rim of a bow, fastened to a breast plate. Then he says through the medium of the Urim and Thummim, I translated the record by the gift and power of God." And that's about as detailed as Joseph Smith gets about the translation process. Was that I used the Urim and Thummim, this is what it is. I translated it by the gift and power of God. Now, Oliver Cowdery writes several letters on translation. And when he comes back into the church in 1848, he does bear his testimony. So apparently they're at winter quarters and Orson Hyde, the apostle who's presiding there, sees Oliver Cowdery, brings him up to the stand, asks him to bear his testimony. And a guy named Ruben Miller writes this down.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [44:50](#)

So it we're talking to a primary source participant, but recorded through a secondary participant. Ruben Miller is writing down what he hears Oliver Cowdrey say. Oliver Cowdrey according to Ruben Miller in that occasion said, "I wrote with my own pen, the entire Book of Mormon, save a few pages as it fell from the lips of the prophet Joseph Smith. As he translated by the gift and power of God, by the means of the Urim and Thummim or as it is called by that book, Holy Interpreters. I beheld with my eyes and handled with my hands the gold plates from which it is translated. I also beheld the Interpreters, that book is true." So that's Joseph and Oliver, Holy Interpreters. They tend to describe them as the Urim and Thummim and the Whitmers tend to describe the use of a seer stone. So does Emma, so does Martin Harris. So you got to reconcile those things.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [45:35](#)

And one of the major things that we've shifted towards saying, is that Joseph used multiple instruments when he translated the Book of Mormon. He used the Nephite Interpreters, but he also used the seer stone that the Whitmers described using. For instance, David Whitmer when he describes translation, says it this way, this is the popular image that's out there now, "Joseph Smith would put the seer stone into a hat. He put his face in the hat, drawing it closely around his face to exclude the light. And then the darkness, his spiritual light would shine, something resembling a parchment would appear. And on that appeared, the writing of one character at a time would appear and under it was written the interpretation in English. Brother, Joseph would read off the English Oliver Cowdrey who was the principal scribe. And when it was written down or repeated to brother Joseph to see if it was correct, then it would disappear, and another character with the interpretation would appear."

Dr. Casey Griff...: [46:24](#)

That is a divine translation process. And a lot of people like David Whitmer's description, because it's describing a very tight translation process. That what you're seeing in the Book of Mormon is exactly what the Lord wanted Joseph and Oliver to write down. People have varied back and forth between saying, "Well, maybe the impressions came to Joseph and he chose the words." David Whitmer makes it sound like the words were exactly given to him. And that's a big deal because when you think about all the meaning that comes from a word like infinite. Infinite appears second Nephi 9 and Alma 34. If that's the exact word the Lord wants Joseph Smith to use in the English language, that means infinite is exactly what it's supposed to mean there. And that's very, very important for us that the wording in the Book of Mormon at least in English is a big deal and we ought to pay close attention to it and what it means.

Hank Smith:	47:20	So we have Joseph, Oliver, David, did anybody else record? Martin Harris?
Dr. Casey Griff...:	47:26	Martin Harris describes it. Emma Smith describes translation.
Hank Smith:	47:30	They were described it similarly to David's.
Dr. Casey Griff...:	47:33	They did. So, basically what happened was is, the reason why the seer stone makes some people a little bit queasy, is because when we put together our narration of translation, our narrative, we relied on Joseph and Oliver. And we didn't rely on people like David Whitmer or Martin Harris, or even Emma Smith, because they didn't end up in the church. But a century later historian started to circle back and say, "look, David and Emma and Martin weren't trying to convince people that it wasn't true. They were trying to say it was miraculous." So whether it's the Nephite Interpreters of the sear stone, I would tell people don't miss the forest for the trees.
Dr. Casey Griff...:	48:14	The main message that every single one of these people was trying to convey was that this was not a normal translation process, that it was miraculous. That it wasn't Joseph learning an ancient language and using his intellect, that it was a miracle that occurred. In fact, let me share something with you really fast. I do interfaith work with Community of Christ and they hold a lot of the papers that belong to the Smith family, specially Emma Smith. Well, one day I was working in their archives and their archivist Rachel Killebrew, pulled out this set of papers that were Joseph Smith's the third's last interview with Emma Smith. They were the actual paper.
Hank Smith:	48:54	The actual paper.
Dr. Casey Griff...:	48:55	I could send you guys this, like she, let me take photographs. It's Joseph the third's notes in pencil on this scratch paper, as he's asking his mom questions. She asked him, "Who were the scribes?: She lists of the scribes, Joseph, Oliver, Alvin Hill. She mentions the Whitmers. Did Sidney Rigdon write the book? She goes, "Sidney Rigdon never showed up to our house until a year after Book of Mormon was written." I never saw him. I never met him." And then at the end, he sits down with her and says, "Just tell me, do you think that dad could have made this up?" This is exactly what he writes on the page in his notes. That Emma said, "My belief is that the Book of Mormon is of divine authenticity. I have not the slightest doubt of it. I am satisfied that no man could have dictated the writings of the manuscript unless he was inspired for when acting as a scribe, your father would dictate to me hour after hour. And when returning after

meals or after interruptions, he could have once begin where he left off, without either seeing the manuscript or having any portion of it read to him.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [49:52](#)

This was a usual thing for him to do. It would have been improbable that a learned man could do this. For one so ignorant and unloaded as he was, it was simply impossible." So I would say to people out there that are getting a little uncomfortable over the seer stone or the Urim and Thummim, or the Nephite Interpreters, the overarching message of the Whitmers of Emma Smith, of everybody involved in this process was it was a miracle. There's no way as they saw that Joseph Smith could have faked this. That Emma who's the first scribe of the Book of Mormon who records a lot of the lost manuscript, just saw it as something that was impossible for him to pull off. And that is the consistent message they're trying to come across. So worrying less about what instrument Joseph Smith used and focus more on what they're actually trying to say, which is, this was a miracle.

Hank Smith: [50:41](#)

I really like what you're saying here. I'm hearing as a historian, it's impossible to know exactly what happened because they describe it differently. And that's normal. For everyone to have an experience and describe it differently. And so you're saying, "Okay, he described it this way. He described it this way. She described it this way. We triangulate all those. We have a decent picture of what it looked like, and it's a miracle."

Dr. Casey Griff...: [51:09](#)

And that is the one consistent message that comes through everything. Is people see different things but at the end, everybody was urgently trying to say, this was something I can explain through natural means. Now on the one hand, a testimony of the Book of Mormon comes through the spirit. Absolutely. But it's also nice to know as an empiricist, as a historian that there are people that saw the plates that witnessed translation and that even though, like we mentioned earlier, had no stake in the success of the church, especially after they left it. Upheld it as a true experience that they had. I mean, the Whitmers will always be incredibly valuable for that. I've talked to anti Mormons that hate the church. One guy said, "The thing that keeps me awake at night though, is the witnesses."

Dr. Casey Griff...: [52:00](#)

That's really hard to explain a way what their motive was and why they were so consistent in what they said. So it's a spiritual proof and spiritual witnesses are where we go to first, but it always is nice to have empirical evidence as well. And the Whitmers really come through big time for us when it comes to

empirical evidence. That there were plates, that there was a miraculous translation and that there was an angel involved in the process.

- Hank Smith: [52:28](#) I absolutely love this discussion. I just think of the Whitmers seeing this and the, I don't know, the shock, the awesomeness of the whole thing, just watching this happen. And it's in your house, these are biblical type miracles, and they're happening in your house. It would be outstanding. Of course, you'd never forget it.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [52:56](#) I mean, something as mundane as a road trip between Harmony and Fayette, there's an angel. The experience with the three witnesses, which is described in section 17 of the Doctrine and Covenants happened somewhere near the Whitmer farm. And then according to Mary Whitmer, Moroni appears on the back door of the Whitmer home to speak to her specifically.
- John Bytheway: [53:16](#) And I am really grateful for this part of the discussion. As we have begun these podcasts, I've received communications from people who are queasy about it. And I just love the way that you characterized. So maybe the Whitmers had a different in the details and especially the seer stone and things like that. But overarching was, they were talking about this record is true. I think that's a really good place to go. Because I have people that I respect who are, they say, "Well, the Whitmers were not reliable witnesses because they later left the church." Or whatever. And so I really like what you've done there. That's a much better way to say, "Look at the final fruit of it. They were trying to defend... No, this book was miraculously given." So thank you for that.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [54:13](#) In fact, let me show you something. One story that's told about David Whitmer is that during his lifetime an encyclopedia was published. And in it, in the entry on the Book of Mormon, they recorded that the three witnesses had later denied their testimony. Now, David Whitmer writes, this is the year before he dies, a letter to the publishers. And then a public letter. This is the public letter. He says, "It is recorded in the American cyclopedia and the encyclopedia Britannica that I, David Whitmer have denied my testimony as one of the three witnesses to the divinity of the Book of Mormon and that the other two witnesses, Oliver Cowdery and Martin Harris denied their testimony of that book.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [54:50](#) I will say once more to all mankind that I have never at any time denied that testimony or any part thereof. I also testified to the world that neither Oliver Cowdery or Martin Harris ever denied

their testimony. They both died reaffirming the truth of the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon. I was present at the death bed of Oliver Cowdrey, he writes. And his last words were, brother David, be true to your testimony of the Book of Mormon.

John Bytheway:

[55:22](#)

Please join us for part two of this podcast.

Episode 8 Part II

Doctrine and Covenants 14-17 : Dr. Casey Griffiths

John Bytheway:	00:05	Welcome to Part Two of this week's podcast.
Hank Smith:	00:08	This gives us a great chance, Casey, to move to Doctrine and Covenants 17, which from my studies, it's a moment that Joseph Smith has been looking forward to for a long time. Where the Lord allows a view of the plates to others. Can you tell us what led up to this event? And tell us about the section, Section 17.
Dr. Casey Griff...:	00:27	Yeah, Joseph Smith is following instructions directly in the Book of Mormon. How strange it must've been for him to be translating the Book of Mormon, then all of a sudden he gets to Ether 5 and it's speaking to the translator of the book. Moroni writes directly, "It's like you're reading a story, and then all of a sudden one of the participants turns and looks at you." Imagine watching a movie and a guy up on the screen looks at you and says, "And now I need you to do this."
Dr. Casey Griff...:	00:54	The text reads, "Behold, ye may be privileged that ye may show the plates unto those who shall assist and bring forth a work. And unto three shall they be shown by the power of God, wherefore they shall know of assurity these things are true. And in the mouth of three witnesses shall these things be established." This is in the Book of Ether. Moroni's writing this directly to the translator, and Joseph takes this very seriously. He selects three witnesses, obviously, Oliver Cowdery, he's been a scribe through most of the translation process.
Dr. Casey Griff...:	01:26	This is one indication that Joseph was closer with David Whitmer than any of the other Whitmer brothers, because he chooses him. And then Martin Harris returns back into the story, which I love the fact that Martin Harris comes back because after the lost manuscript, you want to write him off and say, "Enough with that guy." But we don't appreciate how important Martin Harris was in the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. And letting him come back into the story is a sign that, yeah, he did repent, he did change.
Dr. Casey Griff...:	01:55	Martin Harris comes back into the church and becomes one of the three witnesses. Three witnesses choose the 12 apostles. There's a bunch of other stuff that happens. But it's just nice to see Martin Harris step back into the narrative because the last

time we left him, the Lord had called him a wicked man, told him that he needed to repent. Now, Joseph is saying, "I want you to be one of these three special witnesses that the book describes."

- Dr. Casey Griff...: [02:18](#) So, there is a little bit of a hiccup. They select a place near the Whitmer Farm, we don't know exactly where, to go out and pray. The first time that they pray, nothing happens. The second time nothing happens, then Martin Harris decides to withdraw himself. He feels like he's the problem. He leaves, then Joseph and Oliver and David all together have this miraculous experience where the angel appears. The angel not only shows them the plates, but shows them all these relics that are described in Section 17.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [02:50](#) Section 17 lists everything that is going to be shown to them as part of their experience. You can look in verse one, "You shall have a view of the Plates, and also of the Breastplate, the Sword of Laban, the Urim and Thummim, which were given to the brother of Jared upon the mount while he talked to the Lord face to face, and the Miraculous Directors which were given to Lehi while in the wilderness, on the border of the Red Sea.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [03:13](#) But we assume that last reference to Miraculous Directors is a reference to the Liahona itself. And all of them, basically say, Moroni appears. He shows them the artifacts. And then they hear the voice of God bear witness. When the experience closes, David and Oliver go back to the farmhouse. Joseph goes to find Martin. He said, "I found him several rods off, praying on his own." He kneels down and prays with Martin, then Martin has the same experience. He even says that Martin covers his face and says, "'Tis enough, 'tis enough, mine eyes have seen."
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [03:47](#) But, boy, that is neat just not to see an angel, but to hear the voice of the Father bear witness, that the book is true. It's really, really amazing. And then, again, witness of women are important this is the quote that's in your Come Follow Me manual but Lucy Mack Smith is at the Whitmer Farm the day the three witnesses have their experience. So, this is planned as a big event, Joseph brings his family in, he brings Martin Harris down from Palmyra. This is a culmination of everybody that's spent the last two years sacrificing to bring forth this work.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [04:22](#) Lucy Mack Smith says, "I'm coming in." Joseph threw himself down beside me and exclaimed, "Father, mother, you do not know how happy I am. The Lord has now caused the place to be shown to three more besides myself, they've seen an angel, who's testified to them and they will have to bear witness to the

truth of what I have said. For now, they know for themselves that I do not go about to deceive the people. And I feel as if I was relieved of a burden, which was almost too heavy for me to bear. It rejoices my heart, that I am not, any longer to be entirely alone in the world."

Dr. Casey Griff...: [04:53](#)

We sometimes don't appreciate the burden Joseph Smith carried where, you would want to with all your heart show these Plates. I mean, it's easy. It's easy to prove that he's telling the truth. I can just show him the Plates, but he's been given strict commandment to not show anyone the Plates and having someone else see them was apparently a huge relief to Joseph. I've heard of other, not other witnesses like this, but you've got Emma and Lucy and Joseph Smith's siblings say, "Yeah, they were real. I never saw him, but I picked them up. He had them covered up. I moved him to dust, to dust around the table or whatever." So, how faithful are these family members not to say, "Oh, I'll just go ahead and look myself."

Dr. Casey Griff...: [05:42](#)

I marvel at Emma Smith. Emma said, "I moved the plates while I was cleaning and there was nothing." She said that, "I even flipped through the pages with my thumb." Imagine being Emma Smith and there's no one around, I would have lifted up the cloth and taken a look. But Emma's better than me and she didn't. There's other things like the Smith stock, Josiah Stool the guy that employee's Joseph Smith to find the silver mine. He's at the Smith house the night Joseph brings the plates there. And Joseph actually hands the plates through the window to Josiah Stool. I mean, if you're counting people that saw the plates wrapped in linen, there's a whole other cloud of witnesses, male and female that are present there as well.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [06:20](#)

And the fortitude that they have to not say, "Hey, just give me a peak." Or Joseph to not say, "Hey, come here, Sophronia, I want to show you something." It shows how seriously they took these commands and how marvelous it was. Again, Joseph also has the experience where he shows the eight witnesses.

John Bytheway: [06:44](#)

Is that during about the same time?

Dr. Casey Griff...: [06:46](#)

According to Lucy Mack Smith, it takes place a couple of days later, and it takes place at the Smith home in Palmyra. And again, the eight witnesses, if you look down that list are all Smiths and Whitmers, Hiram Page is married to Catherine Whitmer. He's a Whitmer brother-in-law and they all see it. And I think John brought this up earlier, but one of the unique things about these two experiences, the three witnesses and the eight witnesses is the way they reinforce each other. B. H Roberts, for

instance, pointed out that if you want it to disprove the three witnesses, you would say they had a hallucinatory experience, that they were on Peyote or something like that and they hallucinated an angel. At the same time, what the eight witnesses see has no supernatural element at all.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [07:28](#)

They just saw the plates. They handled the plates, the three witnesses see the angel, but all three of them clearly say, "We didn't touch anything. We saw, but we did not touch." The eight witnesses touch and they don't see anything miraculous. So, if you were saying, Joseph was trying to fool the eight witnesses, you'd say he made a fake set of plates and trick these rubes into believing it. But the three witnesses are coming and saying, "It wasn't just plates. It was an angel." One witness is supernatural. One witness is totally natural. And the two back each other up to show that there's no way Joseph Smith could have pulled all of this off, give three people a similar hallucinatory experience under two different circumstances, because there's really two visions, one to David and Oliver, one to Martin Harris, and then to give these eight witnesses at completely mundane experience, other than seeing the plates and holding them. And the eight witnesses themselves give extensive descriptions of the plates.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [08:25](#)

John Whitmer said, "I picked them up. I moved the pages. Here's exactly what they look like. Here's how much they weighed.

John Bytheway: [08:31](#)

I saw the symbols.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [08:32](#)

I saw the symbols on them." I've got an interview with John Whitmer here, do you want to hear this?

John Bytheway: [08:37](#)

Sure. [inaudible 00:08:38].

Dr. Casey Griff...: [08:38](#)

This is an interview John Whitmer does with a reporter from the Deseret News in 1878. So, the reporter says, "I'm aware that your name is a fixed of the Testament of the Book of Mormon, you saw the Plates." John Whitmer says, "It is so that testimony is true." The reporter says, "Did you handle the plates?" "I did so." "Then they were material substance." "Yes, as material, as anything could be." "Were they heavy to lift?" "Yes." "And you know gold is a heavy metal. They were very heavy." "How big were the leaves?." "So far as I can recollect eight by six or seven inches." "Were the leaves thick?" "Yes, just so thick that characters could it be engraven on both sides?" "How were the leaves joined together?" "Three rings each one in the shape of a D with a straight line towards the center."

Dr. Casey Griff...:	<u>09:17</u>	"In what place did you see the Plates?" "In Joseph Smith's house. He had them there." This is the Smith home in Palmyra. "Did you see them covered with a cloth?" "No, we handled them uncovered in our hands and we turn the leaf sufficiently to satisfy us." I mean, it's cool that there's plates, but there's no angel. There's nothing supernatural about the experience they have whereas the experience the three witnesses have is completely supernatural and the two experiences are designed to reinforce each other. And so, like I said, the simple fact that you have eight witnesses plus three that's 11 and Joseph that's 12. That's a nice round number. Don't you think?
John Bytheway:	<u>09:53</u>	We like that number.
Dr. Casey Griff...:	<u>09:54</u>	Twelve witnesses of the Book of Mormon. And then if you want to add Mary Whitmer, it's a Baker's dozen because she sees the plates as well. She's the only-
Hank Smith:	<u>10:01</u>	Yeah, tell us that story. You've hinted towards that story, Casey, I want to hear more about Mary Witmer's experience.
Dr. Casey Griff...:	<u>10:06</u>	Okay. Let me pull it up here.
John Bytheway:	<u>10:07</u>	So, that's also referenced in the Saints Book that hopefully everybody's reading on page 70 or something. I think it references the Come Follow Me manual too. So yeah, go ahead, Casey.
Dr. Casey Griff...:	<u>10:19</u>	We're more cautious with this one because it doesn't come directly from Mary Whitmer. It's a secondhand account. Her grandson, John C. Whitmer is the one that tells this, but here's what he records. He said, "I have heard my grandmother, Mary Musselman Whitmer say on several occasions." So, he heard her say the several times that, "She was shown the Plates of the Book of Mormon by a Holy angel, who she always called Brother Nephi." She undoubtedly refers to Moroni but he says, Nephi. It was at this time, she said, "When the translation was going on to the house of the Elder Peter Whitmer, Peter Whitmer Senior, her husband, Joseph Smith, and his wife and Oliver Cowdrey and David Whitmer, a short time previous brought up from Harmony, Pennsylvania. We're all boarding with the Whitmers and my grandmother and having so many extra persons to care for besides her own large household was often overloaded with work to such an extent she felt that to be quite a burden."
Dr. Casey Griff...:	<u>11:12</u>	So, having Joseph Smith in your house is crazy, I guess. There's extra people there. She already has a large family. She is feeling

worn down. He says, "One evening after having done her usual day's work in the house. She went to the barn to milk the cows and she met a stranger carrying something on his back that looked like a knapsack. At first, she was a little afraid of him, but when he spoke to her in a kind, friendly tone and began to explain to her the nature of the work, which is going on in her house, she was filled with inexpressible joy, and satisfaction. He then tied his knapsack and showed her a bundle of Plates, which in size and appearance corresponded with the description subsequently given by the witnesses to the Book of Mormon."

Dr. Casey Griff...: [11:52](#)

"This strange person turned the leaves of the Plates over leaf after leaf, and also showing her the engravings upon them after which he told her to be patient and faithful in bearing her burden a little longer promising that if she would do so, she would be blessed and her award would be sure if she proved faithful to the end. The personage then suddenly vanished with the Plates and where he went she could not tell. From that moment, my grandmother was unable to perform her household duties with comparative ease and felt no more inclination to murmur because her life was hard. I knew my grandmother to be a good noble and truthful woman. I have not the least doubt of her statement in regard to seeing Plates being strictly true. She was a strong believer in the Book of Mormon until the day of her death."

Dr. Casey Griff...: [12:37](#)

So, it's nice to know that even a person whose role in the coming forth of the Book of Mormon was a milking the cows and making food for everybody was given some measure of reward. Now, I've always looked at this story too and said, "It's so interesting that Mary Whitmer gets an experience like this, but Emma Smith does not... I don't know why the Lord singled out Mary Whitmer and to have this experience, but it is wonderful to know that there is a female witness of the plates as well. There's someone that saw them in broad daylight shown by the messenger and was given a witness."

John Bytheway: [13:09](#)

Wow. You think Lucy Mack Smith, Emma Smith are both going, "Hey, I did a lot for this." But I love how you just were honest there. I don't know why. I don't know why.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [13:21](#)

Well, the other big female witness is Elizabeth Whitmer, who marries Oliver Cowdery. She's interviewed later on. She talks about translation as well. So, she saw at least as much as Emma did as well too. And when we tell the stories of the history of the church, sometimes we forget that one of the unique things about the history of the church is that there's all these women that participated as well. I always tell my students this is no

criticism of the Book of Mormon, but there are five women mentioned by name in the Book of Mormon. In Church History, there's dozens of women that participated in the most sacred of events. And we need to make sure that we're getting their stories out there as well. People like Mary Whitmer, Emma Smith and Elizabeth Whitmer and Lucy Mack Smith really deserved to be heard because they have some great things to say.

Hank Smith: [14:06](#)

Wow, that's fantastic. I think it was Dr. McKay who said, "You can't understate Emma's influence on Joseph Smith." He said, "The church was founded by a man and a woman because they worked together on this. He doesn't even get the Plates until Emma's part of his life. And then it's almost as if he's complete.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [14:35](#)

And along the way, I mean, the first person to really see the Nephite Interpreters or handled them anyway is Lucy Mack Smith. And Mary Whitmer sees the plates, Elizabeth Witmer witnesses translation. I mean, there's a lot of important, wonderful women involved all the way.

John Bytheway: [14:51](#)

Casey, you mentioned that in verse one of Section 17, it lists not just the Plates, but the Sword of Laban and the Breastplate and the Miraculous Directors, perhaps the Liahona. And I was just wondering when we have the account of the eight witnesses, do they mention any of the other things other than the plates? I think a lot of our listeners would like to know, have people also seen the Sword of Laban, for example?

Dr. Casey Griff...: [15:17](#)

It doesn't seem like the witnesses did see all the artifacts that are there. Section 17 is given to the three witnesses primarily. The Lord does say in the Book of Mormon that, "Joseph can show it onto others that assist in the work." But the number eight isn't given specifically either to my knowledge and Section 17 has given to the three. So, the eight witnesses tend to just describe the Plates. They don't talk about the Directors, the Liahona or the Breastplate, or the Sword of Laban. The William Smith who wasn't one of the witnesses. He does describe the Breastplate. And it seems like a lot of the Smith family when Joseph was in Palmyra when first receives the Plates and the Nephite Interpreters saw, or handled those things. Joseph again, would keep them wrapped up in linen cloths but William Smith for instance describes it. But like I said, it seems like the witnesses stick with the Plates. And what is described in Section 17 really is what the three witnesses see.

John Bytheway: [16:20](#)

It's for the three. Oh, that's really helpful. I just wanted to comment to that. I love that at this point, when Joseph Smith

comes home and says, "You do not know how happy I am." That I just think there was such wisdom in having witnesses, in having shared visions that were not just Joseph, but Oliver saw things, Sydney saw things. And now Martin Harris, David Whitmer, they're all... And I think of as we've commented before, I just love the idea of the burden coming off, Joseph. And then as we go through history, we will see when that finally he can say, "The keys are with the 12 and now they can kill me if they want, because the work will go on." I see so much wisdom in the sharing of these things with witnesses. I just thought that's a comment I wanted to make.

Dr. Casey Griff...:

[17:18](#)

One of the real strengths of the restoration is as much as we talk about Joseph Smith, it's not a one-man show. Richard Bushman comments on how there were a lot of movements similar to the saints that are trying to bring back the New Testament church. There's nobody that has anything like the Book of Mormon or claims to see an angel, but a lot of these movements around this time really are kind of a one-man show. And when that person dies, the movements fracture, and dissipate, and kind of go away. One of the reasons why the church has endured to this day is because Joseph Smith was always training other people. There was always a backup. I mean, you can go back and read section three, where the Lord says, "Hey, if you can't do this, I can find somebody else to do it."

Dr. Casey Griff...:

[18:02](#)

And sometimes we put too much burden on Joseph Smith and don't realize the Lord always had another person there. Other than the first vision, which of course is unique and uniquely personal for Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery was there when the priesthoods restored, when the keys are given in the Kirtland Temple, you mentioned that he brings the 12 apostles into the circle. I mean, Joseph is always looking for allies and the Lord is directing him to bring other witnesses into the church. It's always about not just what you can do, but what you're doing to prepare the next person that has to do what you're doing right now. I mean, when you think about the fact that the restoration not only brought Joseph Smith in, but remarkable people, you mentioned earlier, John like Orson Pratt, and Parley Pratt and Brigham Young. Joseph Smith for instance, is not the first official missionary of the church, it's his brother, Samuel that sent out.

Dr. Casey Griff...:

[18:58](#)

Now, along the way, the Lord is directing Joseph to train other people, to take up the mantle. That's part of the reason why we survive so strongly today. And why today in the church, I mean, why do we make eight year olds give talks? And why do we give the priesthood to 11-year-olds? I mean, in any other church,

they would say, "That's ridiculous. Your deacon is an 11-year-old kid." Well, we're always focused on leadership and not just saying, "I had an experience, believe me." But you have an experience. It's interesting how Joseph shows up at the Whitmer Farm and isn't interested in just being secluded and getting his work done, but he's bringing them in, he's using them as scribes and having them participate in this great experience of divinity.

Dr. Casey Griff...:

[19:42](#)

It's not about Joseph. In fact, for everybody in the early church, it was about the book. It was about the experience after you talked to Steve Harper. Steve likes to mention that the first vision, for instance, really comes into its own as the founding event in the 20th century. It's partially because in the 19th century, the miracle everybody would talk about the proof of the church was true, was not the first vision. It was the coming forth of Book of Mormon. And the coming forth of Book of Mormon is very much a collaborative experience. Joseph is reading the text to Oliver, but Oliver is writing it down and so is Emma's brother, Alvin Smith and so are the Whitmer Brothers and everybody's doing their part. It's a communal experience. And we sometimes forget to honor the larger group of people that stood by Joseph and not only supported him, but saw what he saw and saw miracles, just like he did.

Hank Smith:

[20:38](#)

To me, that's that makes all the difference in the world are these, are shared visions. That's something that I would say is impossible to just create just out of thin air.

John Bytheway:

[20:55](#)

And we'll get to this eventually, but man, Section 76 for Sidney Rigdon to be sitting there the whole time and going back and forth, what do you see? I see the same and what a relief that must have been to Joseph to know it at some point, "They can kill me now. My work's done priest has restored. The keys are here." And I show my students a clip from the Cincinnati Gazette that said early in July of 1844 that says, "The terrible excitement from the West, Joseph and Hiram have been shot." And then the last three words thus ends Mormonism. And that's what they thought. This is a one-man show. And I like to tell my students actually, 11 years later thus ends the Cincinnati Gazette. And so, they're not very good at prophesying. They went out of business. But I'm trying to remember, and maybe this is not really our topic today, but I tried to research about how many members of the whole church that even were at the time of the martyrdom, June 27th, 1844. And I got something around 16,000, I think.

John Bytheway: [22:10](#)

And so, now we're at 16 million but I just thought, yeah, I love what you've just said, Casey. I hope people will listen to that and replay it. What a collaborative effort, the restoration, this marvelous work in a wonder was, and how many different people were involved. Thank you for that.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [22:27](#)

And you're just making me realize, I mean, President Ballard likes to talk about councils and how they're strengthened councils. I mean, the three witnesses really are kind of the first formal ecclesiastical council. They're a council in the church before there is a church. If you keep going on in the doctrine covenants, right after Section 17, Section 18 has given to all of Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer. And in that section, they're called specifically to locate and find the 12 apostles. Section 19 is given to Martin Harris, the other one of the witnesses, and all along the way, the Lord is setting up this council system that's going to allow the church to endure. So in 1844, if half the first presidency is killed and the other member apostatizes, you've got a council to step in and take its place. And all along the way, like I said, we're setting up this system, this web of believers.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [23:21](#)

In the human mind we like to simplify it down to one or two people. But we do a disservice when we don't do the deeper work to understand the people that stood by Joseph. The Knight family for instance, is very, very under appreciated. What they did was remarkable. Oliver Cowdery doesn't always get as due. It's true that he left the church, but he did come back and never denied his witness either. And he's right there alongside Smith, leading missions and helping people and training leaders to take his place. So, Peter Whitmer, for instance, whose Section 16 has given to is going to be called in the first formal mission of the church. He's a missionary of the Laymanites. David Whitmer, John Whitmer, they're all given jobs to do in the church. And from the beginning that idea that you can't just come and passively sit and sing the hymns and listen to the sermons is built into the DNA of the church that everybody has a job and everybody's job is important.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [24:15](#)

Maybe Mary Whitmer was sitting there thinking, "I just milk the cows and make the food." But the Lord sends an angel to her as a way of saying, "Your job matters. You are part of the Body of Christ. And the contributions that you're making right now are helping forward the work and bring forth the kingdom of God in the latter days."

John Bytheway: [24:32](#)

Wow. And here we are talking about it today. I love that we're talking about Mary Whitmer and some of these others today. This is good.

- Dr. Casey Griff...: [24:43](#) Mark McConkie tells a great story about something that happened to a young lady at the Whitmer home. Her name is Sally Heller Conrad, Sally Heller Conrad. And it says this, that she was working in the Whitmer home. And it said that, "The home was small. And in addition to the large family already living there, there were guests living in the house as well." And something was going on upstairs. One day Sally noticed a couple of young men come down from the second story. They looked most unusual. Their faces were exceedingly white and strange. She asked the family why they looked that way, but no one would tell her. It's like some kind of secret the family had. As time passed, it happened again and again, each time Sally saw them, their faces were the same unearthly-white, and it frightened her until finally she went to the lady of the house, I'm assuming this is Mary Whitmer and announced that she would not stay with her until she knew the cause of the strange looks of these men.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [25:36](#) The lady of that house was Mother Mary Whitmer at Fayette, New York. It was June of 1829, Mother Whitmer explained to Sally that those two men, Joseph and Oliver were translating a record upon a written upon Plates by the gift and power of God. And that the power of God was so great in the room that they could hardly endure it. At times, angels were in the room in their glory, which nearly consumed them. This satisfied the girl and opened the way to her embracing the gospel. Sally Heller Conrad married in the faith, came West and died in Provo, Utah, July 23rd, 1903 at 92 years old. So, some of these side stories that we try to get as many as we can here on the podcast, John these seemingly ordinary people, having extraordinary experiences.
- John Bytheway: [26:24](#) I love that story too, because of the consistency of the shining face thing of Moses, of Abinadai. Just last week in church, somebody quoted a President Jamesy files October 2005, taught, called a light in their eyes and spoke of students at the BYU Jerusalem Center in how the one of our friends over in Jerusalem said, "Okay, we know your young people, aren't going to prose light, but what are you going to do about that light in their eyes?" And it's kind of a consistent thing. That's a fun story. That's Mark McConkie. And what's the book?
- Hank Smith: [26:57](#) Mark McConkie a book called Remembering Joseph. I'm sure Casey's read that more than I have.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [27:03](#) It's a wonderful book. Great book. And that's usually the first book I hand people to read about Joseph Smith because it's all firsthand experiences. Really good stuff. See, I was scrambling

while you brought that up, Hank. Similar experience, this is from Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner, a little girl who meets Joseph and Kirtland. She was present when Joseph was speaking, she said, "Those who looked at him that day said there was a searchlight within him. Over every part of his body, I never saw anything like it on the earth. I could not take my eyes off him. He got so white that anyone who saw him would have thought he was transparent. I remember that I thought I could almost see the cheekbones through the flesh. I have been through many changes since, but that is photographed on my brain. I shall remember it and see it in my mind's eye, as long as I remain upon the earth."

- Dr. Casey Griff...: [27:52](#) So, what this young lady you quoted is describing, what Mary Elizabeth Rollins is describing is transfiguration. It's a physical change that happens when someone is really in connection with God. And if we're assuming that heavenly Father is speaking directly to the three witnesses, they're transfigured as well, when they have this experience with the angel and have the experience where they hear the voice of God.
- Hank Smith: [28:17](#) Just one quick thing. Mary Elizabeth Rollins, isn't she one of those that hides the partially printed Book of Commandments? Poor thing.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [28:25](#) Yeah. [crosstalk 00:28:25] is instrumental in saving the manuscripts of the Book of Commandments during a mob attack in 1833. She's got a great story, by the way, I've visited her grave in my mom's hometown down in Minorsville, wonderful early witness of the restoration and just her autobiography on its own is worth a read because she just happened to be present at so many interesting times in the church.
- Hank Smith: [28:51](#) When we go back, I want to just mention one thing about the three witnesses. I wonder if Moroni looks at those three and says, "If you ever deny this, I will find you." And then that's the fear of the rest of their life is, "I did not deny that," they're looking around. "I did not deny that." You know what happens if that there's this almost like, "I saw that angel and I told him I would I'd stay with it."
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [29:19](#) Well, do you want to hear one of those stories? I love that, do you remember that seminary video all those years ago with that little British kid that, "What's your name? "Willie or something like that."
- Hank Smith: [29:31](#) Oh, yes, I remember.

Dr. Casey Griff...:	29:33	This is William Pilkington, he's the young man that's depicted in the seminary video.
Hank Smith:	29:37	With Martin Harris, right?
Dr. Casey Griff...:	29:38	With Martin Harris, yes. Martin Harris rejoins the church comes to Utah, ends up in Clarkson where they used to do the Martin Harris pageant. They don't anymore. But this is what Martin Harris told William Pilkington. "Just as sure as you see the sun shining, just as sure am I, that I stood in the presence of an angel of God with Joseph Smith and saw him hold the gold Plates in his hands. I also saw the Urim and Thummim, the Breastplate, the Sword of Laban, everything listed in Section 17. I saw the angel descend from heaven. The heavens were then opened. And I heard the voice of God declare that everything the angel had told us was true. And the Book of Mormon was translated correct. I was commanded by God's voice to testify to the whole world what I had seen and heard.
Dr. Casey Griff...:	30:24	Now, again, you know to a little 14-year-old kid, that's come to work on your farm and be your hand. You say stuff like that. It's powerful that, like I said, through every single phase of their life, the one thing that's consistent is regardless of how these witnesses feel about Joseph Smith and the church, they are 100% consistent in what happened at the Whitmer Farm. This is a touchstone for them that changes everything that comes after in their lives.
Hank Smith:	30:53	Wow. The Book of Mormon and the resurrected Lord have a lot in common, that here it comes out of a stone tomb and it has all these witnesses. In fact, the Savior was seen by his 11 apostles and here we have eight witnesses and three witnesses there are kind of 11 witnesses of this book. There's an angel there, when he comes out of the tomb, there's just some similarities there, but I love what you said. And I think this is probably the most important part is that it changed those people. You look at the apostles in the New Testament, after the resurrection, they get stronger, they get more confident and it seems to happen with these Book of Mormon witnesses that they get even stronger and more confident after these incredible experience.
Dr. Casey Griff...:	31:38	Yeah. Yeah. And like I said, those days that they spend on the Whitmer Farm or some of the happiest of their life. I mean, every single one of them is a changed person after and credit to them, whatever happens, they do stay consistent to what they said about the Book of Mormon and the angel.

John Bytheway: [31:57](#)

As far as the eight witnesses, I'm trying to recall have I seen a painting where they were outdoors, or it was this in the house when the eight witnesses handled the Plates, was it out on a table?

Dr. Casey Griff...: [32:15](#)

Tony Sweat talks a little bit about this. How none of the sources describe whether they're indoors or outdoors. They all say near the Smith home. So, we assume it was outdoors somewhere, but Tony talked about how every depiction of that event, there's always like a tree stump that Joseph has the Plates on. Nobody mentions anything like that. They just all say we handled the Plates and we flipped the leaves. And we were able to see for ourselves that the record was a real thing. And I would say also that, that maybe that's... Sometimes when people talk about the seer stone, they get a little discouraged because it sounds like Joseph Smith is just receiving texts via the instruments that he doesn't need the Plates. Texts like Section 17, underline how important the actual record was itself. That it wasn't just a divine revelation, as wonderful as those are most of the Doctrine of Covenants is a divine revelation that it's a translation of an ancient record and the plates were physical. And that's an important fact to us.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [33:17](#)

Now, I wish to high heaven that we have the Plates, but if you can't have the actual physical record, having 11 people that have seen it and eight of them that have actually physically held it is the next best thing. I mean, that hold up in just about any court of law that I'm aware of. Some people might be thrown off a little bit by the similarity between Section 15 and Section 16. They're almost identical.

John Bytheway: [33:41](#)

We haven't addressed that.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [33:43](#)

And that is really unique in Joseph Smith reveal. Section 15 and Section 16 are the only place where that happens. They're both very brief. They say the exact same thing and that could throw a couple of people off, but I wanted to read this quote I found from John A. Widtsoe where he commented on the similarities. He said this, "The Doctrine of Covenants is a compilation of the revelations received by Joseph Smith, to individuals, for guidance in the church. For the first years of the work, the prophet kept every scrap of paper pertaining to the progress of the work. In fact, this care of things that must have seemed trivial is one of the evidences of the sincerity of the man. For example, when John and Peter Whitmer asked for help, he received for each of them, a revelation that's substantially the same. This simple revelation is directed to the individual. And at

first sight has no permanent value for the church. Yet, as a revelation from God, it was preserved and published."

Dr. Casey Griff...: [34:35](#)

"An insincere man would have eliminated this and other similar revelations as of little consequence, not so with Joseph, the Lord had spoken, the words were part of building the Kingdom of God, and the same advice would be useful to many men then, and now." So, I just thought other words had an interesting perspective that the two, the similarities between Section 15 and Section 16 are a witness of how sincere they were. Like Peter Whitmer, whose Section 16, is given to never leaves the church. He dies in the faith before the Whitmer family takes off. And to him, that was a revelation. It's kind of like, I think of all those people that get a patriarchal blessing and it's really short or something like that. I had a companion on my mission that I walked into his room to borrow some toothpaste and his patriarchal blessing was out. And it was literally two sentences long.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [35:24](#)

So, while I was grabbing the toothpaste without realizing it, I read his patriarchal blessing. And I came out and said, "Do you ever feel cheated that your patriarchal blessing was only one or two sentences?" And he said, "That's a revelation from God to me, it doesn't matter how long it is. It's a big deal." And I'm guessing both John Whitmer and Peter Whitmer would say, "It doesn't matter if they were identical. It was a revelation from God to me. And it's significant." And it's neat that Joseph Smith and the council that put together the Book of Commandments and Doctrine and Covenants, both felt, "Even though these are the same and they say the same thing, let's put them both in, just so at least there's a witness there that the Lord spoke to Peter Whitmer and John Whitmer, even if it's back to back and says the same thing."

Hank Smith: [36:09](#)

That's beautiful. It really is beautiful. The idea from Widtsoe, this idea of him being he's sincere, he's like, "Well, [crosstalk 00:36:18]."

Dr. Casey Griff...: [36:18](#)

Every scrap of paper.

Hank Smith: [36:19](#)

"I'm going to put it in there. The Lord said it. I mean, if you ever have problem with it, take it up with him, but I'm going to put it in." That's fantastic.

John Bytheway: [36:27](#)

But the overall message is this book was translated by the power of God. Oh, so, so great. Thank you.

Dr. Casey Griff...:	36:34	Well, and even your lady, that's calling David Whitmer a liar. I hope push back against her a little bit and saying, "Hey, David Whitmer was testifying of a miracle. He was sincerely trying to get people to believe that he had seen a miracle."
Hank Smith:	36:47	When they write me that I think the Lord liked him, right? The Lord like David Whitmer. He chose him.
John Bytheway:	36:54	I mean, I've got my Joseph McConkie and he was David Whitmer was not a reliable witness. I mean, he says it right out there. And I guess because of later antagonism or whatever, but that's kind of the tack this lady was taking too, is that we can't trust anything he said.
Dr. Casey Griff...:	37:15	Well, and Joseph McConkie was my teacher and Craig Ostler, his coauthor is one of my dear friends. I think both of them would say, "Just be careful with what David Whitmer said." That his witness, his witness, like I said, was written later on in his life it's decades later. He did have an axe to grind against Joseph Smith at that point in time. And so, they're probably correct in saying the top tier of witnesses are Joseph and Oliver, but then we've got all these lower tier witnesses that are important to them.
John Bytheway:	37:45	Yeah. I just love the way you said it. Joseph and Oliver always talked about Urim and Thummim or Nephite Interpreters. And I sometimes get to the point in my classes where I want to say, "We report, you decide." One school of thought says this and other people said this and leave it and go, "Huh."
Dr. Casey Griff...:	38:04	Yeah. And I like how Casey did that. Yeah. That's all you can do with the sources at again, accepting that the big message David Whitmer probably didn't want us to get caught up in the sea or stone. He wanted us to understand this was divine, so did Emma, so did Martin, so did everybody that was involved in translation.
John Bytheway:	38:22	And that beautifully done.
Dr. Casey Griff...:	38:22	They were trying to describe a miraculous process and you've got to, like I said, not miss the forest for the trees here. The forest is, this was a miracle. The trees are, "Hey, sometimes he used to seerstone and sometimes use Nephite Interpreter."
Hank Smith:	38:36	I do the same thing in the New Testament where you got Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, who sometimes don't agree on the details, but the message is the same.

Dr. Casey Griff...:	<u>38:45</u>	And that disagreement is a sign that it's authentic. It's organic. If everybody's telling the same story with exactly the same details, that means they got together and made it up on their own. On the other hand, human beings are complex, they see things, they misunderstand things. That's a sign that it's genuinely authentic. That's part of the reason why probably it's a relief to me that the first vision accounts aren't all the same. If Joseph Smith was lying, he would have told the same story on every single occasion. But if he's telling the story organically and genuinely, he's like, "Oh, and you know what? This will help you too. Let me add in this detail."
Hank Smith:	<u>39:21</u>	Yep. Because I've done that before, where I tell a story and then that becomes the way I tell that story. And I'm not reminiscing. I'm not digging my mind for details. I'm just telling a story because that's the way it's told.
Dr. Casey Griff...:	<u>39:35</u>	Yeah. And one time, Hank, I was at EFY and I told the story of our first child being born. We had all these complications, my wife was there with me. It was the first time as a session director. And at the end, she was like, "You got so many details wrong." And I go, "Well, you were on drugs. You didn't even know what was happening." And she was like, "Yeah, but it just showed that like 10 years later, I mean, an authentic story does have little things creep in."
Hank Smith:	<u>40:03</u>	All the time.
Dr. Casey Griff...:	<u>40:03</u>	My wife and I don't tell the exact same story because first of all, we're experiencing it from different vantage points. And like I said an authentic story, isn't going to be 100% consistent because of human nature and the way things work.
Hank Smith:	<u>40:18</u>	And there's also a complexity in the reorganization and the kind of the feud between the two and Joseph Fielding Smith saying anybody who's involved with the reorganization is terrible and awful and not reliable. And then Elder McConkie is a son-in-law to Joseph Fielding Smith. And so, there's some loyalty there.
Dr. Casey Griff...:	<u>40:41</u>	And like I said, that's totally fine. Our narrative, the established narrative in the church was created at a time when those things really were fresh in everybody's mind. But now that we're getting centuries later, we can look at someone like Emma or David Whitmer and say that they really weren't trying to say that it wasn't miraculous, in fact, quite the opposite. So, let's take what they have to say and accept it for what it is and put it in the historical record and not make judgements. Let's just-

John Bytheway:	41:09	And just say, "This is what they said. This is what they said."
Dr. Casey Griff...:	41:13	That's exactly what we should do.
Hank Smith:	41:15	These are human beings. I love when someone says the church lied to me, I'm going, "No, no, no. You just don't understand Joseph Fielding Smith, the feelings he had for his cousin, Joseph Smith III and how he kind of said, 'This is going to be our narrative,' because these are really rotten people who are trying to say that polygamy never existed." And there's so much complexity going on.
Dr. Casey Griff...:	41:36	And even the narrative that the church is hiding this stuff. No, Joseph Fielding Smith and B.H Roberts were arguing all the time over what sources they should use. If you read comprehensive history of the church, B.H Roberts was using David Whitmer and Emma Smith and all these records with the seerstone. And sometimes like I said, the argument gets carried through generations and we can back off a little bit and say, "All right, let's overlook the tails. Let's look at the overarching message here." And David Whitmer later on said, "Joseph Smith was a religious and straightforward man." He had to be for, he was illiterate and could do nothing himself. That's the other thing that bothers me is everybody feels free to say, "Yeah, Joseph was illiterate." They never qualify that he had to trust in God.
Dr. Casey Griff...:	42:22	He could not translate unless he was humble and possess the right feelings towards everyone. To illustrate so you can see, "One morning when he was getting ready to continue the translation, something went wrong about the house. And he was put out about it. Something that Emma, his wife had done. Oliver and I went upstairs and Joseph came up soon after to continue the translation, but he could not do anything. He could not translate a single syllable. He went downstairs out into the orchard and made supplication to the Lord. Was gone about an hour, came back to the house and asked Emma's forgiveness and then came upstairs where we were. And then the translation went all right. He could do nothing save he was humble and faithful. At times when Joseph Smith would attempt to translate, he would look into the hat which the stone was placed and found he was spiritually blind and could not translate."
Dr. Casey Griff...:	43:08	"He told us that his mind, well, too much on earthly things and various causes would make him incapable of proceeding with the translation. When in this condition, he would go out and pray. When he became sufficiently humbled, before God, he could then proceed with the translation. Now, we see how very

strict the Lord is and how he requires the heart of man to be just right before he can receive revelation from him. Again, Whitmer is saying this isn't an academic process because, "Hey, I can go in and do academics when I've been in a fight with my wife, I don't have to have the spirit necessarily to do those." Joseph couldn't translate if he wasn't in harmony with his family members. I remember reading this story as a young seminary teacher. And that morning I got into a fight with my wife, went into teach my first class and it was lousy.

Dr. Casey Griff...:

[43:53](#)

There was no spirit there. So, in the break I walked in, I called Liz and apologized to her and sincerely expressed my regret for some of the things that I'd said, went out and taught the next class and the spirit was back. I mean, this isn't a normal translation process. Your relationship with your wife shouldn't affect your ability to translate, but Joseph has to have the spirit with him. And the way that he treated his loved ones was a big part of him having the spirit and us having it as well. So, that as much as anything has shown me, that if I want to have the spirit, I want to go out and teach with power and the Holy Ghost, I've got to do as much as I can to be in harmony, not just with God, but with the people that he's placed in my life to assist me along the way.

John Bytheway:

[44:41](#)

I found the same thing and probably you did too, Casey, when you were a Bishop, if everything was okay at home, I could be a really mediocre Bishop. If these were not good okay at home, I couldn't do anything. And it really became foundational. And it really became emotionally foundational. I'm so glad everything is okay in my marriage because the other stuff I'm dealing with is really hard.

Dr. Casey Griff...:

[45:09](#)

I was so surprised when I got called as a Bishop that I received very little counsel about the word and a lot of council about my home. Like, "Hey, you put your family first, make sure that your wife and kids aren't neglected. You do those things first and your calling will kind of fall into place." And I saw that again and again, if I started to get out of balance between home and church and work. I would really struggle in my spiritual part of my calling. It's same thing with Joseph Smith. I mean, that's just reassuring to me. That's one of those imperfect stories about Joseph Smith that gives me real hope for myself.

John Bytheway:

[45:45](#)

I loved what you said. "I want to be like Jesus, but I identify with Peter." Because when we get to Section 19, I'm going to tell people, I identify with Martin Harris. I worry about money. I mean, Section 19, there are so many cool things in there. So, but anyway, Casey, that was just awesome.

Hank Smith:	46:06	One of the messages I receive from the story of Martin Harris is that the Lord does not define us by our mistakes that he allows us to make mistakes. And then He says, "Let's move forward." And allowing Martin to be one of the three witnesses is a message to all of us. I think that, "Yes, you're going to make mistakes along the way and no, you're not done." But there's more to be done and I don't condemn you. Dr. Griffiths thanks so much for being with us today. It's weird for me to call you Dr. Griffiths, you're Casey to me.
Dr. Casey Griff...:	46:39	Just is Dr is fine, Hank.
Hank Smith:	46:41	Yes. Thank you, Dr. You are a historian and a scholar, you know as much about Church History as anyone. And I know you're going to say, "Well, no, there's people who know it better than me." But I at least can say you know Church History, as well as any critic of the church in any critic of Joseph Smith, yet here you are. There's a myth out there, I think, among people that the more you get to know Church History, the more likely you are to, "Oh, no, this is all not true. And I'm going to get out of here." But yet here you are, you've been studying and teaching this for 25 years now, 20 to 25 years of your life.
Dr. Casey Griff...:	47:23	Yeah.
Hank Smith:	47:23	I would just love to hear your thoughts, your personal thoughts on Joseph Smith, the restoration and what it's done for you personally having the background that you have.
Dr. Casey Griff...:	47:35	Well, when it comes to Church History, I will say that my fear isn't that people know too much it's that they know too little. I love the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon is what converted me to Christ and helped me gain a testimony of the resurrection and the divinity of Jesus Christ and His Gospel. That said the Book of Mormon tells the story in black and white. It's got good guys and bad guys, and it's very, very direct as to who they are. And there's complexity there for sure. But one of the reasons why I've always loved Church History is it's not a simple story. It's really not. You can spend your entire life reading about the people that participated and the context that they existed in and the events that they talked about and still learn new things.
Dr. Casey Griff...:	48:26	It's messy is what I would say. And that isn't something that any student of the history of the church or the scriptures should be afraid of. Hank, you teach the Old Testament. That is a messy book, right, so is the New Testament, and to a certain extent, the Book of Mormon, even though the Book of Mormon had an

incredible editor. The guy who really knew what he was doing. There's indications there of messiness, chief among them, the editor keeps complaining about how messy the book is and apologizing, even though he did a fantastic job. Church History is the messiest of all of them. And that complexity really isn't something that you should be afraid of, it's something that you should embrace. To me, it's a mark of this sincerity and authenticity of these people, that they weren't perfect, that they messed up, that they stumbled, that they fell, but sometimes they were ex-communicated from the church.

Hank Smith: [49:17](#)

They had conflicts.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [49:18](#)

They had conflicts with each other. They weren't perfect people. To me, that just really makes me, I'm sorry to say, feel good. It doesn't disturb my testimony because when I can look at someone like David Whitmer or Oliver Cowdery or Martin Harris or Joseph Smith and see how much they struggled, it makes me feel a little bit better about myself. I used to always tell my kids when I read the New Testament, I want to be like Jesus, but identify with Peter. I'm more of a, would sink to the bottom of the ocean rather than the stand, walk-on-the-water type of person. And seeing the flaws that these people had and yet what they accomplished in spite of it, to me, is very, very heartening and encouraging. And like I said, I would say to any person studying the Doctrine and Covenants this year, just embrace the complexity, celebrate it.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [50:12](#)

You don't get to just read the Doctrine and Covenants, you can read half a dozen books on the Whitmer family, or Mark McConkie is Remembering Joseph or any other thing out there and just get more and more details and intricacies and complexity of what was happening there. At the same time too every once in a while, you've got to pull yourself back and look at the big picture and say, "Hey, the story here is that Jesus is still an active participant in the lives of men and women in our day. And that angels and miracles and gifts and revelation are the same as they were anciently." That what we're being told is a consistent story through the Old Testament, New Testament, Book of Mormon and Church History, that there is a God who loves us and a savior who is resurrected for us. And He and His angels are there to help and assist us along our way as imperfect as we are.

Dr. Casey Griff...: [51:06](#)

So, maybe I'm messed up, but I've never wanted my heroes to be marble statues that have no flaws. I've always loved the fact that Mary Whitmer was overwhelmed having Joseph Smith, that maybe Joseph Smith wasn't the best house guest. Maybe that's

the message you get from that story or that Martin Harris wasn't perfect when he walked out to have that witness experience and deliberately withdrew because he wasn't. That the Lord saw each of these people in their weakness and not only saw their weakness, but saw their potential. He not only saw them for what they were, but for what they could be, and that he lifted them up and made them into something bigger than they were. That to me is just really, really encouraging.

- Dr. Casey Griff...: [51:50](#) And like I said, I sincerely 100% believe that I've walked in places where angels have stood. And I love that. I mean, I want to be part of a sacred story. I want there to be miracles because ultimately that means that as confusing as life is, there's a higher purpose and meaning to it. And that's one of those things that gets me out of bed every day and helps make it through the day.
- Hank Smith: [52:14](#) Dr. Griffiths Casey, thank you so much for joining us today. John, I can't say enough about the experiences we get to have with these incredible minds.
- John Bytheway: [52:25](#) Yeah. And I want to go back and listen to Casey again. I'll fast forward through me, but I want to hear Casey again, on some of those wonderful things you said about translation. It was really great. Thank you so much.
- Hank Smith: [52:38](#) Yes, I was so touched. Thank you.
- Dr. Casey Griff...: [52:40](#) Thanks for having me. Yeah, it's great to be here.
- Hank Smith: [52:43](#) Thank you to all of you who stayed with us today and who listened to the podcast episode. We're especially grateful to Steve and Shannon Sorenson who are our producers, along with our production team Lisa Spice and David Perry. And I also need to throw out a thank you to my teaching assistant, Maddie Flinders for some of the help she gave me. Maddie served her mission back in the New York sites. And so, I was texting her this morning, saying, "Hey, Maddie help me out with a couple of these stories." So, thank you to Maddie. So, my friends join us on our next episode of Follow Him. We'll be back with another of, one of the church's great minds and some of the churches just minds, me and John. Some of the churches minds. Join us next time. Thank you so much.